

From data to storytelling: Istat communication strategy to share and viralise statistical information from the Italian permanent census of population and housing

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Abstract

ABSTRACT

Since 2018, thanks to an innovative censuses-integrated communication campaign, Istat has been constructing a new narrative of the permanent Population & Housing Census, conveying news and information to wider and heterogeneous audiences.

In Istat empowered cross-media communication strategy, old and new communication channels are strongly integrated, from the traditional “analogical” actions of media relations, event organizations, institutional public relations, to the prospective “digital” and social dimensions (twitter, linked Instagram, Youtube,...).

In this methodological and communicational (r)evolution, visual data-storytelling has been playing a pillar-role in responding to cultural and digital changes, as well as in consuming statistical.

The Internet has changed the way people interact and research accountable and synthetic information, as people become more than ever “hungry for news” however they have less free time available.

Therefore, in December 2020 Istat enhanced a new communication strategy tie-in with the release of Census results, which is focused on alternative ways to share and disseminate data through more “pop” communication tools and products.

Thanks to this “pop-narrative strategy”, the multidimensional and extraordinary informative potential of permanent Population & Housing Census is becoming more intercepting, and is now intriguing broader, transversal and non-specialized targets, captivated by data visualization products, such as infographics, video-tutorials, video animations, dedicated web platforms, and virtual events.

In particular Istat realized 3 campaigns aimed at promoting census results that will be illustrated: a cycle of infographics relating to the demographic structure of the country, education, foreigners in Italy and the mobility of Italians, adapted in multiple formats for different social networks, unpacked in carousel and transformed into video animations, which animated the social plan; a cycle of 21 regional social cards of demographic cut, each containing two "structural fixed indicators" and a regional "curiosity". And in conclusion an organic social Yesterday / Today campaign, to explain how the country has changed thanks to the historical comparison of the censuses (1951/2019).

Since confidence in public statistics and dialogue between producers and consumers is a crucial asset to citizens' involvement, both in data collection and consumption, Istat has been increasingly investing in



multidisciplinary approaches (statistics, graphic design, psychology) to understand and facilitate mechanisms of information consumption.

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**FROM DATA TO STORYTELLING:
ISTAT'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY TO SHARE AND VIRALISE STATISTICAL
INFORMATION FROM THE ITALIAN PERMANENT CENSUS OF POPULATION & HOUSING**

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Since 2018, thanks to an innovative censuses-integrated communication campaign, Istat has been constructing a new narrative of the permanent Population & Housing Census, conveying news and information to wider and heterogeneous audiences, about main innovations and advantages of information for the knowledge of the country.

In Istat's empowered cross-media communication strategy, old and new communication channels are strongly integrated, from the traditional "analogical" actions of media relations, events organizations, institutional public relations, to the newer prospective "digital" and social dimensions (twitter, linked Instagram, Youtube,...).

In this methodological and communicational (r)evolution, visual data-storytelling has been playing a pillar-role in responding to cultural and digital changes, as well as in consuming statistics.

Therefore, in December 2020 Istat enhanced a new communication strategy tied-in with the release of Census results, which is focused on a strategy of datatelling, by using alternative ways of sharing and disseminating data through the creation of more "pop" communication tools and products.

Since trust in public statistics and in the dialogue between producers and consumers is a fundamental asset for the involvement of citizens, both in data collection and consumption, Istat has been investing more and more into multidisciplinary approaches (statistics, graphics, psychology) to understand and facilitate information consumption mechanisms.

In this perspective, Istat aims to create participatory knowledge and a shared heritage with citizens, through the use of circular communication which closely links the "call to action" for responsible participation in the Census and the dissemination of results.

The "pop-narrative strategy of datatelling" is able to amplify the vast information and multidimensional potential of the Permanent Population Census, thanks to data visualization products, such as infographics, video tutorials, video animations, dedicated web platforms and virtual events, it therefore becomes a motivational lever for respondents, managing to intercept and intrigue increasingly broader, more transversal and non-specialized targets.

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It is therefore not a question of simply experimenting with communication languages and platforms to adapt to communication trends, but rather finding the most effective communication methods to bring citizens, the non-professionals, to acknowledge data as a form of interpretation and knowledge of the country. Thus, Socialization with statistics becomes a fundamental step to obtaining consent to participate and a unique opportunity to read and understand the changes, and build the future of the country.

1. ISTAT'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR CENSUS RESULTS

1.1 THE MAIN GOALS AND THE NEW CHALLENGES OF THE COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

In December 2020, the dissemination of the results for the first two 2018-2019 editions of the Permanent Census of Population began, which gave back the country a wealth of information on the main demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the population in great territorial detail (at municipal and sub-municipal level).

Traditionally, the dissemination of statistical data in Istat takes place through highly profiled products and channels for expert or insiders targets, such as press releases, report statistics, publication of data tables or implementation of dissemination systems, such as databases or the most recent data browsing.

The Internet has changed the way people interact and research accountable and synthetic information, as people become more than ever "hungry for news" however with less free time available. So, in recent years Istat has multiplied the methods of disseminating data, through data visualization products which, on the one hand, have made it possible to expand the audience of users to the general public and, on the other, to respond to a growing demand for quality statistical information. "An innovative approach in data visualization aimed at enhancing dissemination and communication of statistics taking into account users' needs, expectations and skills."

Precisely in this context, the communication campaign dedicated to the permanent population census "Italy needs samples" was grafted which, in conjunction with the release of the census results, built a real narrative strategy of the data, capable of enhancing the vast information potential of the census, but above all to tell and provide multiple interpretations of reality, from particular angles and perspectives, in order to intrigue and intercept more transversal, non-specialist audiences.

The communication campaign is built on two pillars: 1) according to a cross-media logic of media integration, in which the digital and social dimensions are strongly integrated with the traditional actions of media relations, events organization, institutional public relations towards partners and stakeholders and 2) around a strategy of datatelling and storytelling, through the experimentation of languages and new methods of disseminating data to amplify and keep attention on the census operation.

The strategy of datatelling has also been realized thanks to the dedicated web site www.censimentigiornodopogiorno.it and the social channels, that have represented the natural platforms to viralize all communication tools and data visualization products.

In particular the web site, designed to accompany the communication campaign of each activity of the permanent censuses, has represented not just an institutional space but also a real digital hub that collects all contributor and communication actions implemented to promote and inform on censuses and to involve citizens and the various targets through specific initiatives.

1.1. FROM STORYTELLING TO DATATELLING: TAILORED COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS

From December 2020 to June 2021, Istat tailored communication campaigns aimed at promoting census results, through the development of videos and thematic cycle of infographics.

- A cycle of infographics relating to the demographic structure of the country, education, foreigners in Italy and the mobility of Italians;
- A cycle of 21 regional social cards of demographic cut, each containing two "structural fixed indicators" and a regional "curiosity";
- A weekly organic social campaign denominated "Yesterday / Today", that explains how the country has changed through the historical comparison of the censuses (1951/2019);
- A cycle of thematic Infographicss dedicated to the main foreign communities that live in Italy;
- A Video tutorial on the integrated System for the dissemination of census data.

Produced together with the various disseminations aimed at a general target and a specific target (foreigners in Italy), these are products characterized by a graphic style aimed at strengthening the image and visual identity of the campaign which have been built to amplify the dissemination of results through multiple channels.

We asked ourselves "What kind of information is searched and how does a general public prefer to receive such information?" Which census data is potentially more appealing and how do we avoid oblivion?

The concepts of closeness, reflection, and identification have been the guide for some of the thematic choices, allowing one to build stories to which wider audiences can identify and recognise themselves through.

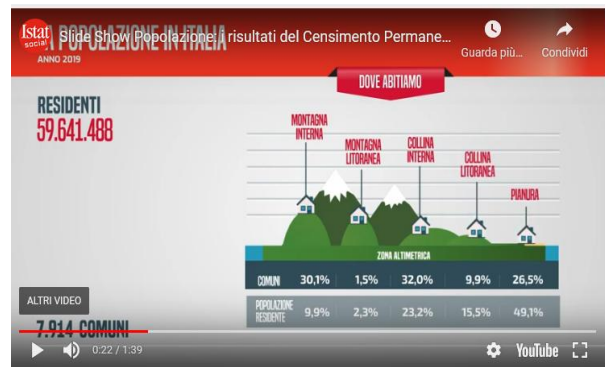
A reflection that has gone beyond the medium, the format, the language and the graphic design, ... to build upon an immediate and intuitive narration, aimed at increasing the degree of usability and dissemination of information and bringing the different audiences closer to the permanent themes of censuses and statistics in general.

Therefore, a series of products have been created, they are able to provide an alternative, simplified representation of the macro-themes typical of traditional releases (Press releases), always according to a Datatelling logic.

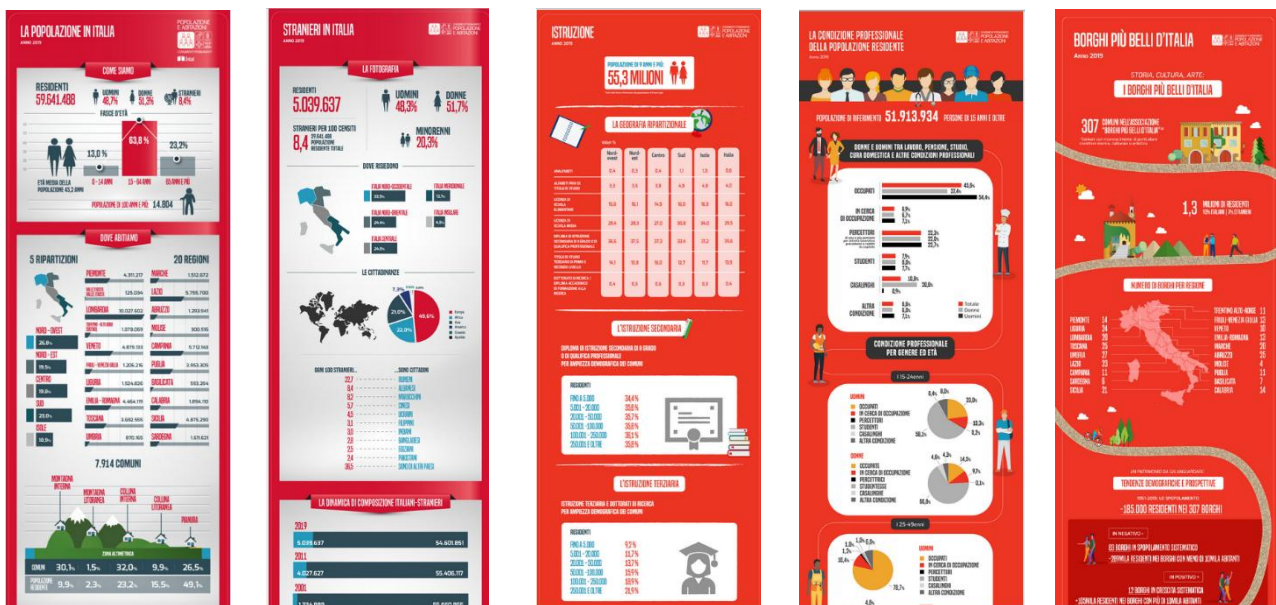
A cycle of infographics related to the dissemination of national data

The first cycle of infographics was created in conjunction with the dissemination of national data (December 2020).

Five static infographics and a video animation were created and disseminated which follow the macro themes of the press release, dedicated to the demographic structure of the country, to education, to professional condition, to foreigners in Italy, to the most beautiful villages.



Each infographic was adapted into multiple formats for different social networks, unpacked in carousel and transformed into video animations, which animated the social plan.



In May 2021 Istat published the infographic and video animation dedicated to the release of data on mobility and the causes of displacement of Italians, perfectly consistent with those relating to the country's demographic structure.

They represent its natural development, preserving its structure, graphic structure and backing track.



A cycle of 21 regional social cards of demographic cut

As regards to the dissemination of census data at regional level, a datatelling strategy was built to support 21 regional press releases by the Press Office from the end of January for about three weeks. In this case, 21 regional social cards of demographic cut were created and disseminated through the social plan, each containing two “fixed structural indicators” and one “curiosity”.

In addition, a web section dedicated to these releases was built on the censimentigiornodopogiorno.it site, where all products and actions carried out were integrated and put into the system, in a cross-media logic. A sort of wall of all the Italian regions that collect regional statistics reports, social cards and videos of the regional data dissemination and analysis event (March 2021).

<https://censimentigiornodopogiorno.it/leggere-il-paese-analisi-dei-principali-risultati-regionali-del-censimento-permanente-della-popolazione-e-delle-abitazioni-2018-e-2019/>



A Social campaign denominated “Yesterday / Today”

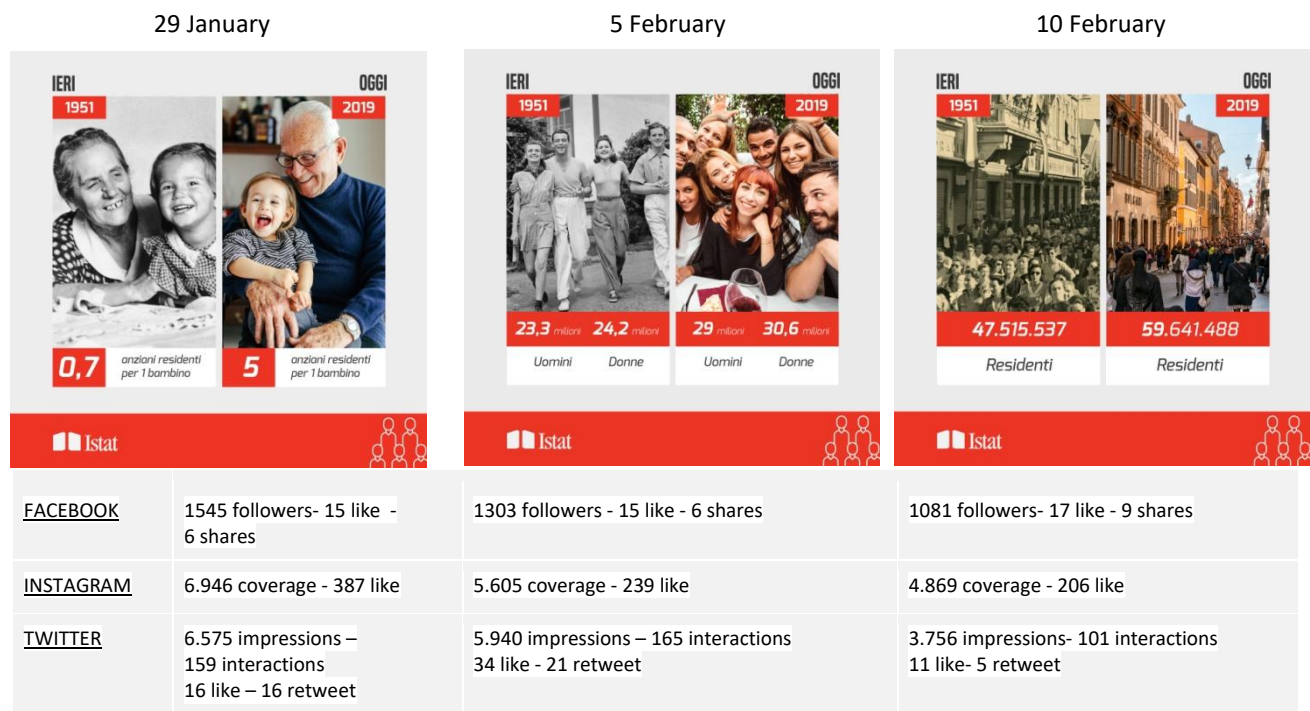
As for the products designed for a generalized target, the organic social campaign Yesterday / Today was of great impact. Broadcast weekly, from January 29 to April 9, on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, which thanks to the datatelling strategy, contributed to the effectiveness of communication in terms of engagement, focusing on the history of census surveys and on the enhancement of the statistical census assets.

A story built on the comparison between the 1951 and 2019 censuses, also selecting significant data for non-professionals such as number of residents, old age index, average age, level of education, birth rate, men / women.

The goal was to explain how the country has changed as a consequence of the historical comparison of the censuses, thus strengthening the engagement of the generalist target, through a thematic reading and the construction of an evocative and pop storytelling, in line with the social grammar.

The format was characterized by a precise graphic choice, aimed at connoting the social cards and retaining users in the address book.

The insights demonstrate the effectiveness of communication in terms of engagement, registering a higher performance in the first 3 weeks than the overall average achieved by the other institutional posts.



A cycle of thematic Infographics for the main foreign communities in Italy

The latest datatelling operation concerns the one profiled for the foreign target, which took place from the beginning of May to the end of June.

The objective was to give targeted information to the foreign population habitually residing in Italy, which is part of the statistical sample that each year participates in the permanent population census, involving it in view of the next survey in October.

We have selected all the information relating to the foreign presence in Italy and in particular to the seven largest communities.

<https://censimentigiornodopogiorno.it/stranieri-in-italia/>



Then we have created eight thematic Infographics in Italian, a general one about foreigners in Italy and one for each community, that has been translated in the appropriate foreign language.

To viralize these infographics, we developed more social cards, declined in 4 formats for social channels.

Again in this case, as for the regional results, a dedicated and profiled web section on censimentigiornodopogiorno.it was implemented according to a cross-media logic, as the ideal hub for all these products which were also disseminated through targeted PR and sending Dems (direct e-mail messages) to specific targets and interested parties.

Video tutorial on the integrated System for the dissemination on Census data

Within a campaign dedicated to the promotion and amplification of census results, one of the leading products created was the video tutorial for the presentation of the integrated system for the dissemination of census data.

It collects the entire information assets of the censuses through: a Data thematic warehouse entirely dedicated to permanent censuses (I.Stat), dedicated to data analysis for expert researchers; a new Data browser, more dynamic and accessible to the non-specialist user thanks to the visualization of graphs and dashboards that visually summarize the information which is also linked to a particular territory; and a GIS system with territorial analyzes.

In order to bring a much wider audience closer to these three navigation systems, and make them more accessible to an audience of non-experts, as well as to illustrate, in a simplified and captivating way, the architecture and navigation routes, a video tutorial characterized by a simple language and a captivating animation and visualization system was created.

<https://censimentigiornodopogiorno.it/come-accedere-a-tutti-i-risultati-video-tutorial/>



To bring even non-expert users closer, it was useful in the design of the video tutorial to highlight general questions close to the common user that would capture his attention. Thanks to the use of pictograms, animations and a light graphic sign, it has been possible to reduce that sense of technicality that seems to characterize various information systems.

The video tutorial is one of the products envisaged by this campaign on census results, but from a different angle ... it does not just tell in numbers but explains where to get them and how to use them.

The video tutorial was therefore the subject of a mini promotion campaign both through the thematic site censimentigiornodopogiorno.it, both on the institutional website of Istat, and through a dedicated plan on social channels.

1. POPULATION CENSUS' "VISUAL DROPPER-FORMATS", FOR A SYMPATHETIC STATISTICS

2.1 SHOW, DON'T TELL! THE STATISTICAL EPIC OF BISONS' REDEMPTION

The Italian National Institute of Statistics has a valuable and consolidated tradition of scientific communication and dissemination, based on its multi-source and multi-dimensional production anchored at sample and administrative surveys on socio-economic, political-cultural, institutional and territorial-environmental domains, and of course on Population and Housing Census.

Over the years, Istat communication/dissemination area has polarised that information sharing on textual, tabular, statistical elements in the strict sense, both with evergreen formats (press releases, data tables, datawarehouse) and a fleet of flagship products-pillars (i.e. Italian Statistical Yearbook, Annual Report, Italy in Figures,...).

Indeed, that all-encompassing focus on communicating "the content", and less on the still exquisite, albeit marginal, "visual architecture" that envelops and reinforces the content itself, has been perfectly consistent with a long historical time period, during which a complete interconnection between interdisciplinary knowledge had not yet fully matured. Up to 10 years ago, statistics, graphic design, technologies and IT tools, neuroscience, psychology, psychology of communication were areas and disciplines not so used to cooperate in statistical Institutes.

Consequently, neither for speculative reflection and technical practicability, nor for the global "informative era" of the moment, on a communicative level statistical information, and, more specifically, the Italian population Census in it, had been up to the new Population Census (2018-2019) less a "common good" and more a "tool for experts".

For many decades and waves, even if capital for public planning, economic agency, and more generally for skilled stakeholders, worldwide statistical information and Census data communicated by NSIs have therefore been less devoted to achieving non-expert targets.

In accordance with a "hierarchical" information era, characterized both by the unidirectionality of the information process (=sender-recipient) and the selectivity of the recipients of the information (=expert users), communication products with statistical/Census content have thus discounted lower affection among people less familiar with statistics, thus perceived as a service aimed at *niches* of specialists (journalists, stakeholders, policy makers, ...).

Nevertheless, with the proliferation both of products and targets, in the last 10 years visual-storytelling has been suddenly perceived as the lacking and indispensable dimension for a "democratic" transfer of key messages with statistical content.

In the current, apologetic era of the Internet and the social networks, visual-storytelling seems in fact crucial across official statistics producers, committed to the contemporary challenge of knowledge-sharing through universal participation & inclusion.

In fact, if still in 1993 only scientific, research and military fields used the Internet, and the web 1.0 was characterized by a "descending" communication flow, in which communication recipients' desires and proposals still remained in the penumbra of the strategies of institutional communication, with the "web 2.0" (2005) the era of participatory culture on the Net has

supported the progressive rethinking of NSIs communication strategies, up to their authentic re-engineering and industrialization based on the current and becoming era of the "web 3.0".

Indeed, in the new "information era", words like "interaction", "circulation" and "re-elaboration" became foundational-identifying practices in a "sharing space" the more and more blurring the distinction between producers and consumers of statistical information. The epiphenomena of advent, multiplication and propagation both of social networks in all socio-economic and political-cultural stratifications and of non-qualitatively controlled information sources, as well as the disintermediation of access to information, speed up the reflection on how to guarantee universal but strict and exemplary information.

A sort of tension towards the fusion of the "sender-receiver" polarities invest today's communication professionals, required to co-create the message, rather than to unilaterally transmit it. A co-creation, albeit obviously with completely different roles, played both with the inclusion of the expectations of the targets in the primary process of information design-production (=inclusion of the pole-input of the receiver in the construction-output of the sender), and with the amplification/reworking of the original information by targets themselves (=inclusion of the sender-output pole in the construction of the receiver-new input).

Like other National Institutes of Statistics, and with incremental awareness and coherence, Istat therefore enhances the protagonism of the prosumer in an increasingly convinced way, overturning the "hierarchical perception", in the information chain between "producer" and "consumer", to appropriately perform in the contemporary world.

Consequently, in a first step Istat gave value to "targets' neo-protagonism" focusing on users' feedback (analytics on comments, re-sharing, interactions, timing consumption on social profiles, surveys on users' satisfaction,...), to dynamically adapt its portfolio of communication products with statistical content. In a second and present step, Istat has been undergoing a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying "statistical consumption" and the quality of information/knowledge transfer.

In recent years, that broad-spectrum understanding of the multifactorial and interdisciplinary matrix of targets involvement and "loyalty" orientates both the current/futuristic design of communication formats with a statistical content and the cross-media strategy for their dissemination. That understanding is in fact propaedeutic to the qualitative-quantitative expansion of audiences and users' satisfaction.

In this perspective, to skilfully ride the futuristic wave of the 3.0 era, Istat decided "to go back to the future" 35 thousand years ago, as Doc Emmet Brown would say³, to "update" the oldest epic of visual storytelling, entrusted to immortality in "frescoed" caves with bisons and brave hunters.

Starting from engravings on the stone, and seamlessly up to our days, the human being has in fact remained tetragonal in his need and resourcefulness to renew forms and contents to "visualize life". Thus to correspond to the dizzying succession of ever new needs and desires, the Homo Sapiens species has dynamically reinterpreted the intersection between image, word, number and art. If originally the number of slaughtered bisons was represented with a primitive piece of stone, and in 1800 "data visualization" found its formalization by changing wars, over the years '80 the

³ Quote from the movie "Back to the Future" by Robert Zemeckis (1985).

leap of software for visualizations definitively delivered data storytelling to global popularity, up to the contemporary “visual era”.

Resonating with the transition to "visual", and anchoring its “pop” strategical perspective in multidisciplinary scientific bedrocks, Istat chose to disclose an informational patrimony such as that of the new permanent Census of Population and Housing by designing “Census dropper-formats” (cards, infographics, videos, digital wall, posts, tv-radio shows,...) as well, in addition to more “traditional” products (press releases, tables).

Indeed, if on the one hand Istat adheres to the renewal of protagonists and places of statistical and non-statistical information (=multiple and heterogenous targets; increased communication channels/media aimed at sharing visual content), on the other hand Istat adheres to that exploded "need/desire for representation" because bio-psychologically reassured about the scientific value of this adhesion.

First of all, the Italian National Institute of Statistics is scientifically reassured of this renewed and visual-oriented communication strategy by meta-analysis on best practices capitalised from other national Institutes of statistics and other official reliable sources. Secondly, Istat is scientifically convinced of its “visual breakthrough”, because wisely receptive to neuropsychological evidences on human psychological and physical predisposition to learn via visualization. A need, even before a desire, to be supported in the pursuit of the noble goal of a more democratic statistical information.

In response to the global exponential consumption of visual products, with the innovative strategy of Population and Housing Census’ visual dropper-formats, Istat certainly intended to enter this long world wave of statistical communication products (infographics, cards, videos). Nevertheless, with even greater conviction Istat has committed itself to qualitatively and deontologically connote its performative “surfing” the 3.0 era, adhering to the most rigorous and stimulating applicative research on interconnections between neuropsychology, psychology of communication and information visualization & design.

Moreover, Population Census’ visual dropper-formats aim at flank and drag a more classic strategy of caensuary heritage of communication & dissemination, because visual data-storytelling products are expected to viralise key statistical contents to a potentially boundless audience, both for their intrinsic characteristics as facilitators of reception, understanding and assimilation of the information conveyed, and for the proliferation of available media.

In a few numbers of meta-analytic synthesis, we can quickly scroll through some scientific explanations for human craving for graphical information (table 1).

Tab. 1 – A visually-wired brain

70%	Sensory receptors located in the eyes, out of the total number of receptors for exteroception
50%	Share of human brain constantly engaged in visual processing
0.01 seconds	Time taken by the human brain to grasp the meaning of a scene, when captured visually
150 milliseconds	Processing time of a visual symbol
100 milliseconds	Time to attribute meaning to a visual symbol
+80%	Increased attention to information if colour-coded, both because colour is an emotional activator and because colour facilitates message understanding
80%	Information remembered if acquired also visually
THEREFORE...	
95%	Level of understanding of information, when packaged as a combination of text and graphics

Nevertheless, everything that is “info-graphic” is not necessarily “in-formative”. In this perspective, complex professional synergies have to interconnect (statistical, graphic, visual-storytelling competences) for an authentic achievement of multiple objectives (to inform, to explain, to intrigue, to teach, to engage, ...) entrusted to an informative “products’ family” such as that of P&H Census visual dropper-formats.

If the human brain is well equipped to visually acquire information, this privileged potential to learn is successful only when the information input is packaged in an accurate way, to prevent the so-called "cognitive overload": an overload of work required by the working memory to process visual but disorganized information.

In conceptually and graphically designing each specific P&H Census’ visual dropper-format, Istat pays the utmost attention to interpenetrate the need for a visual communication but scientifically aimed. The aim of a visual communication scientifically strict is pursued not only thanks to the rigorous “wrapping” of crucial indicators to capture Census domains (=statistical scientificity), but also thanks to the deep understanding of mechanisms underlying the storing of statistical information in a pleasant, accurate and lasting way (psychological scientificity).

Population Census’ visual dropper-formats prevent in this sense the "cognitive overload", both from the risk of an excessive *quantitative* exposure to census-based inputs and the risk of a poor *qualitative* exposure to census-based inputs. In other terms, visual inputs as well, although potentially more easily "assimilable", could suffer from inability to satisfy the three "cognitive expectations" of our "brain wiring", to perform in an excellent way: the expectation of high

essential processing, the expectation of low incidental processing, the expectation of low representational processing.

In fact, each Population Census' visual dropper-format (a card, an infographic, a video) tries to guarantee the optimization of essential processing and the minimization of incidental and representational processing (Table 2).

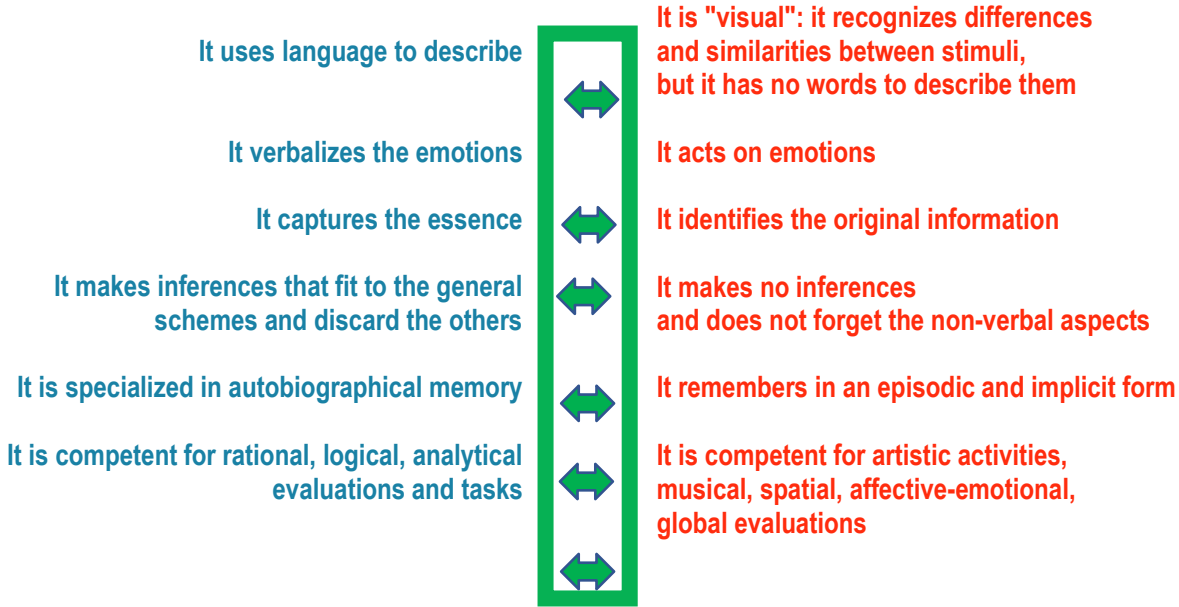
Tab. 2 – Population Census' visual dropper-formats, to optimise cognitive processing

<p>TYPE OF PROCESSING</p>	<p>PERFORMATIVITY OF POPULATION & HOUSING CENSUS VISUAL DROPPER-FORMATS</p>
<p>ESSENTIAL PROCESSING Cognitive process necessary to attribute meaning to complex and less complex inputs (texts, images, combinations of texts and images).</p>	<p>Today, neurosciences solidly demonstrate how the performativity of essential visual processing is based on the possibility of accessing images and words selected in a qualitatively rigorous way. That good selection guarantees to visualisations their potential to synthesize information; to organise coherent and logical information; to structure the integration of words and images.</p> <p>According to Istat standards, the conceptualization of infographics, cards, videos, posts for P&H Census, tries to respond in this perspective to that "cognitive demand", transversal across audiences. More in detail, each visual dropper-format combines statistical and graphic accuracy and coherence, to facilitate meaning attribution, memorisation and reusing in a simple, correct and rapid way.</p>
<p>INCIDENTAL PROCESSING Overload of cognitive processing because of the "fatiguing way" information is conveyed through. That overload leads to a poor understanding of the input during memorization and learning phases, and/or even to its rejection during the "consumption phase".</p>	<p>Thanks to the graphic-textual structure of P&H Census dropper-formats, the overload caused by the "effort of signification" is almost eliminated. In fact, Census cards, infographics, videos, posts, shows, games are designed according to the techniques of cognitive overload minimisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) thematic segmentation of the graphic-textual content b) sequencing of content in order to orientate access to information c) content coherence d) elimination of information redundancy.
<p>REPRESENTATIONAL PROCESSING Cognitive processing necessary to inputs' holding in working memory, until concluding access to information and its multilayered meaning.</p>	<p>The overload of representational processing (= overcommitment of working memory), can lead to comprehension bias and/or deficits in attention, and/or memorization and/or learning. This overload</p>

	<p>is for example generated when contents require a lot of time, in order to abstract a non-partisan meaning (e.g. reading several pages of a text).</p> <p>P&H Census dropper-formats, because of their intrinsic speed of consumption, reduce time of representational processing, allowing people less trained to "cognitive marathons" as well, to fully understand key information at a reasonable time.</p>
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The optimisation of cognitive processing it's strictly intertwined with a performative synergy between our hemispheres competences, that P&H Census' visual dropper-formats always take into account (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 – Left and right hemispheres: different and symbiotic twins that breathe experiences



2.2 WELCOME TO POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS' VISUAL DROPPER-FORMATS COMPANY

As Hitchcock was used to say, the inescapable buzzword in film writing is to show, not to tell.

Still today, the mantra "Show, don't tell!" echoes throughout the rooms of screenwriters, dialogist, directors and every professional involved in cinematic expression. What is skillfully *shown*, in fact, carries with it complex subtexts of "unspoken", that contribute to an amplified, deep and solid knowledge precisely because not verbalised.

Therefore, Istat tries to transfer the magic of cinematographic construction to the world of statistical information working as a "film production Company", in the complex and exciting designing and implementing P&H Census' visual droppers.

Regardless to the format chosen for a specific P&H Census' visual dropper (i.e. infographic, card, video, digital/real walls/totems, radio-tv shows,...), the construction process that turns "statistical inspiration" into Census-droppers, always goes through the sacred and distinctive phases of cinematographic works.

In fact, "(...) thanks to this method of *showing* the audience elements of the film's backstory and context, rather than simply *informing* the audience, the director creates a sympathetic relationship between the viewer and the protagonists", Blake Howard was used to underline.

Mutatis mutandis, Istat statistical communication area and Census communication area synergically share the same objective, designing any Census' visual dropper: to create a sympathetic relationship between "spectators" of statistical key-contents intended to be transferred, so as to transform Census information in an inspiring experience of active citizenship.

Which steps for sympathetic Population Census visual-droppers then? (Figg. 2 and 3).

To enhance statistical information produced from new permanent Population and Housing Census, the inclination to grasp anywhere and from anybody "inspirations" is a salient aspect to constantly renew types and contents of communication Census-droppers. If in a film Company the idea for a production could come, for example, from a scriptwriter, a screenplayer or a director, in "Istat Company" the inspiration could come both from internal professionals (statisticians, communicators, graphic designers, social experts,...), and from external realities time to time co-involved in the commitment to transform the "Italian Census revolution" into a cultural revolution (public institutions, schools, radio and television broadcasters, enterprises, associations, NGOs,...) (Inspiration Step).

The inspiration of a Census dropper is always followed by an "ideational squaring". As well as before the beginning of scripting a movie, it is essential that the entire Production has a clear understanding of the so-called "control idea" (=the nuclear concept of the movie) expected to develop over one hundred and more pages, before working on a Census communication product it is essential a firm hold on the underlying idea and purpose. Thanks to this "pitch step", the inspiration can properly turn into "statistical drops", to distill the essence of complex phenomena in a synthetic, rigorous and captivating way (Pitch Step).

Whether a film or a Census communication product, when the idea and the purpose of a potential creative product are crystal clear, it is essential to evaluate its placeability within vision and

context strategy of the Company, whether referring to vocation, programming, timing, resources both of a film major or of an official Statistical Institute such as Istat (Assessment Step).

If the idea is appropriate and feasible, the subsequent crucial step is to choose the format best suited to convey the identified key-message (=control idea) we are about to spend time, resources, passion, imagination on. As in a Film Company professionals would brainstorm on a short or long development of the narrative (short movie, feature film,...), Istat/Istat and its partners would decide to invest for example on a set of cards, on a set of infographics, on video-pills to communicate Census contents (Type of product Step).

Each format can of course “host” different narrative stamps. If in a movie the same control idea can be expressed, from time to time, shooting a comedy, a drama or a science fiction movie, for example, a Census statistical message could engage different targets through popular, institutional, scholastic atmospheres as well. Obviously, in defining the genre of a Census-dropper, Istat never forgets to brainstorm on targets their product could be address to (Genre Step).

Like in a movie, each Census statistical dropper then has its irreplaceable "protagonists". In other words, a very important step, when processing a communication product Population Census-tied, consists on identifying “protagonist phenomena” to be represented in, with particular clarity and consistency. Targets of each specific Census-dropper have to immediately grab "protagonist numbers", "heroes" or "villain numbers" it does not matter, to "fondle" of their “statistical vicissitudes (Protagonists Step).

Fig. 2 – Population Census Cinematography: from Inspiration to protagonist Numbers

EPIC OF A (STATISTICAL) MOVIE – from inspiration to protagonists		
	AT A FILM COMPANY	AT A CENSUS-DROPPERS COMPANY (ISTAT COMMUNICATION)
INSPIRATION	Subject writer, screenwriter, Director, Producer,...	Inside Istat (Direction of Communication, Production Area), outside Istat (Institutions, schools, NGOs, Media, Partners,...)
PITCH SESSION	Control idea (= what's my movie about)	Subject (= what's my product about in a row)
ASSESSMENT	Vision and strategy of the major, opportunities, programming, target, times, costs	Vision and strategy of the Institute, opportunities, programming, target, times, costs
TYPE OF PRODUCT	Short, medium-length film, feature film	Card, infographic, video-pill, video
GENRE	Narrative stamp (= drama, comedy, fantasy,...)	Stylistic stamp (= methodological, informative)
PROTAGONISTS	Heroes and villains	Heroes and villains statistical phenomena

After choosing the “protagonists” (=key phenomena), screenplayers in a cinematographic major and Istat storytellers work on the “plot”, on the narrative architecture. An architecture that in

movies consists on scenes, sequences and acts, and in Census-droppers in indicators, subdomains and domains (Plot Step).

Obviously, not all narrative / statistical passages have the same dramaturgical / informative intensity within a communication product, be it a film or an infographic. For this reason, in drafting a Census-dropper particular attention is paid to the identifiability of “impressive” numbers, so that “spectators” could be particularly aware when facing these narrative climaxes (Climax Step).

When shooting a movie, great importance is of course given to the direction of photography, to create the right perspective and atmosphere of the story in each specific moment. In a Census statistical communication dropper, the “direction of photography” consists on different “shots” on phenomena, obtained through graphic processing. Spaces, location of information, sizes, choice of fonts, colours, graphic elements, pictures, all contribute to give a specific atmosphere to represented statistics (Photography Step).

As obviously, this complex processing of movie/Census storytelling needs a director, able to orchestrate different professionals involved in the magic of creation (Direction Step) and to lead the refinement of a movie or a Census-dropper (Post-production Step).

When a movie/Census-dropper is ready, essential becomes its circulation and viralisation, so that its message could be shared with the widest audience, expected and not expected. Depending on genre and content, the distribution of the film/Census-dropper will be aimed at those places, real and/or virtual, most "attended" by the identified target. For a younger audience, for example, pop formats and contents would be more easily conveyed on social networks such as Instagram and Facebook, while for a professional audience, more sober and 'serious' contents would find a natural habitat in “cinemas” like LinkedIn and Twitter (Distribution Step).

After the circulation of the movie/Census-dropper, it is always time to draw conclusions for the film production Company/the production “Company” of Census visual droppers. With this aim, as a Major carefully studies the receipts or non-receipts at the box office, the "Major" of Istat communication questions successes and failures of its products, to constantly improve the communication strategy of an information pillar such as the Population & Housing Census (Assessment Step).

Fig. 3 – Population Census Cinematography: from Plot to performativity Assessment

EPIC OF A (STATISTICAL) MOVIE – from plot to awards		
	AT A FILM COMPANY	AT A CENSUS-DROPPERS COMPANY (ISTAT COMMUNICATION)
PLOT	Narrative architecture (= scenes, sequences, acts)	Conceptual architecture (=indicators, subdomains, domains)
CLIMAX	Narrative junctions of high intensity	Key numbers
PHOTOGRAPHY	Shots (long shot, medium-long shot, Medium-close shot,...)	Graphic design, spatial organisation, graphic elements, colours, fonts, ...
DIRECTION	Conduction of the creative process	Conduction of the creative process
POST-PRODUCTION	Editing, audio synchronisation, test screenings, ...	Statistical and graphic refinement
DISTRIBUTION	Circulation of the film (= cinemas, tv, platforms)	Circulation of the product (=website, social networks, congress, press conferences)
ASSESSMENT	Box office, reviews, awards	Media coverage, performance on old/new media, reuse in books, magazines,...

2.3 CENSUS COMMUNICATION (R)EVOLUTION: A STATISTICAL SAGA... *TO BE CONTINUED...*

For the Italian National Institute of Statistics, the Population and Housing Census communication campaign has been representing a real (r)evolution, since strategical and content challenges are constantly intertwined to better and experimentally perform on new and old media, in order to accomplish the commitment of Census statistics as a crucial public good.

Always rooting creative inspirations and operational processing in preparatory multidisciplinary detailed analysis, Istat professionals try to range from videos to infographics, from testimonials' pills to games, from structured shows to national and territorial events, both to engage large audiences and to share knowledge.

The encouraging results of this pilot-experience, motivated Istat to extend this creative but rigorous approach to all permanent Census (Census of Public Institutions; Census of Enterprises; Census of Not-for-profit Institutions; Census of Agriculture).

Thanks to this transversal adoption of an innovative communication strategy, each Census wave allows to assess strengths and weaknesses in order to capitalise and transfer best experiences across any sector of Istat communication.